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Curating the Legacy of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

Paul O’Kane, January 2015

5,000 words

Between 24 Sep - 26 Oct 2013, Bea De Sousa -curator of the Agency gallery, London (renowned, since the 1990s, for supporting and promoting a speculative art of difference) - staged an exhibition at the Korean Cultural Centre, London, which manifested a research exercise into the work of the late Korean artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-82). The show, subtitled ‘A Portrait in Fragments’ was a response to the Korean Cultural Centre, London’s ‘Curatorial Open Call’ and based on limited access to the artist’s archive at University of Berkely CA. The curator used the opportunity to expand knowledge and awareness of the artist, introducing Cha to new audiences. She also commissioned contemporary artists Ruth Barker, Bada Song, Jefford Horrigan and Su Jin Lee to devise, produce, display and perform new works in response to Cha’s oeuvre. A co-incidental screening of works by Cha at London’s ICA, hosted by Juliette Desorgues, was contextualised with a public discussion between Bea De Sousa, myself, and the audience. At the same time I began to teach a new, BAFA seminar, ‘Technologies of Romance’, at Central

St Martins College, London. The following is a response to these combined experiences.

Before venturing any further into this topic Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's (1951-82) name might arrest us. The western, Catholic first name gives on to Korean, together making a form and rhythm that ends in a sound that is strangely satisfying to pronounce. While 'Theresa' has a slightly saintly resonance the Korean 'Hak Kyung' (as derived from Chinese characters) can be interpreted as meaning a celebration of learning ('Hak' is the same root as for 'Hakkyo', meaning school.) It may be appropriate then that, while the legacy of such a short-lived artist is readily available to mythologisation Cha is also identified with an academic context. Most of her youthful work was evolved in response to educational programmes, campuses and in dialogue with a study of contemporary theory. So, rather than dwell on any potential mythology arising from the fact that Cha was raped and murdered at the age of 31 it might suffice to say that the

short form of her life tends to influence interpretation of its constituent events.

Not only did curator Bea De Sousa bring Hak Kyung Cha's work 'to life' and to a new audience through her exhibition *Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, A Portrait in Fragments*, she also demonstrated, with an distinctive mix of sensitivity and authority, just how a curator might impose a coherent experience and a homogenising style onto such a heterogeneous collection of materials. We often hear of curators being more or less 'creative', and of occupying a role of quasi/artist, but De Sousa did something here that could be seen as a model for others aspiring to her role and profession. Avoiding an overt sense of personal intrusion she nevertheless implemented a strong element of design and control throughout the show that was empathetic to the look and feel of the artist's *oeuvre*. The curator thus managed to celebrate the artist as a contemporary with little sense of misguided sentiment and eulogy.

All this is appropriate and fitting for an artist who died so young and so violently as it allows her work to live and breathe in a time when,

but-for the cruellest of fates, she might be extending her work and abilities today in dialogue with a new generation of artists. In the catalogue essay written by De Sousa the curator takes pains to avoid the kind of sycophantic mythologizing which occasionally threatens to colour and misrepresent Cha's work and legacy, whereby the circumstances of her death might come to be regarded as the major fact about her life. This - De Sousa adamantly points out - would only be a further injustice and - we might add - a misinterpretation or misuse of the potential for reading Cha's oeuvre in any way romantically.

It was a revelation then to 'meet' and get to know Theresa Hak Kyung Cha in this way and to share the experience of such carefully deployed research with visitors to this show, many of whom might be moved to deepen their knowledge of the artist and spread the word about Cha.

Thanks to De Sousa's project we can consider Cha both as a contemporary and as an influential artist relevant to emerging practices involving technology and performance, as well as in dialogue with issues of translation, migration and other aspects of complex 21st Century identities. Cha's ideas and works also inform

the phenomenal increase and development today of adventurous, confident and competent Asian art and artists, working in European, American and other global contexts, for whom Cha can now be more clearly seen to have been something of a trailblazer.

The conscious deployment, by De Sousa, of a fragmentary record, based on limited access to the main archive of Cha's works at Berkeley CA, might remind us of the fragmentary and compressed narrative that every life, long or short, inevitably becomes. Cha, a young woman who will always be young is invoked here through interviews made by artist Su Jin Lee wherein those for whom Cha was friend, colleague, sister or student recall her and invoke her *milieu*. Elsewhere we glimpse traces of Cha in scripted, filmed and photographed performances as well as in her writing. Just before she died Cha published *Dictée*, an experimental novel, which is now well known, respected and scrutinised in many comparative literature departments.

To curate an overlooked or under-explored artist's work involves the utilisation of certain familiar technologies. Vitrines, photocopies,

videotapes, monitors, and photographic prints all come into play. De Sousa used all these familiar devices but tailored them to the specific project at hand so that the design and materials used in the show take on an unusual consistency. From customised vitrines and monitor stands to the ways in which a mere photocopied script might be hung and staged, every aspect of this exhibition and the experience of the audience seems to be under the critical and aesthetic control of the curator's vision and always seeking to do justice to the legacy of the artist for whom the show is both a celebration and a slightly mournful tribute.

De Sousa's exhibition also incorporated a substantial live performance element. This re-embodiment of the spirit of the artist in the form of contemporary, commissioned performances was perhaps the most dynamic and generous means of perpetuating and extending her work. Here we escaped the aesthetics and procedures of the archive, set aside the aestheticising effects of time upon outmoded technologies, and challenged the present to shine the its own modes of representation on Cha's legacy. This was not any kind of re-enactment, on the contrary Cha's invention seemed to get 'under the

skin' of the various performing artists as they passed their own knowledge and experience of her work on to the contemporary audience in a kind of relay which dynamically demonstrated the potential for curating to breathe new life into old works and deceased artists.

Invited artists prepared work as responses to Cha's own, both for the opening event and for another near the end of the show. Ruth Barker's compelling rendition of a extended poem wove contemporary and purposefully banal imagery into the symbolic classical narrative of Persephone – one of the heroines featured in Cha's novel *Dictée*. ' Jefford Horrigan played out an arcane ritual involving furniture, clothes, flowers and clay, which subtly echoed Barker's poem while interweaving signs of nature, romance, life, the body and death into a domestic scene. Bada Song, executing slightly shamanic gestures and donning a hand-stitched cloth made up of circular red rags, recited a melancholic and revolutionary Korean song (also featured in Cha's novel) once banned under Japan's colonial rule over Korea. Song also contributed a digital photographic work and a sculpture, both inspired by readings of Cha's *Dictée* ') Meanwhile sections of Cha's writing

were hauntingly and repeatedly pronounced by actor Helen Wilkes performing as a kind of crier for the event.

The contribution of contemporary artist Sujin Lee's filmed interviews, featuring Cha's contemporaries, teachers, friends and fellow students, was staged by De Sousa as a kind of curation-within-a-curation, set in a corner where a kaleidoscope of intimate personal memories could be viewed, collated and compared. Thus yet another way was found to attempt an objective manifestation from one time into another of Cha's lost identity. Different speakers gave different impressions and had different tales to tell so that watching Lee's interviews seemed to invite the audience to add the 'flesh and blood' of these personal dimensions to the outline that could be gleaned from Cha's austere and rather stark works and documents. Nevertheless, no matter how many times we scrutinised the looped films Cha seemed to remain missed and missing from the world we now share with those who shared directly in the milestones of her practice and who sensed and interacted with the everyday personae of the artist.

De Sousa's careful approach to curating also informed us about the many ways in which Cha embraced new technology in her work, always exploiting its potential to extend an exploration of human experience. Whether the technology was a film camera, video monitor, amplified microphone, bound, printed and illustrated novel or, indeed the 'technologies' of language and the body, Cha used all these diverse vehicles, often in combination, to deconstruct subjectivity and to thereby inhabit a shifting zone in which our humanity and our technologised environment reciprocate. The artist seems to have been acutely aware of the ways in which modern technologies influence modern image-making and story-telling. She also seems to have been keen to rescue some degree of humanity from them in a way that might be compared with the Romantics at least in the sense that the subject thus sees herself enduring and proceeding through an age of new technologies, exploring her human responses and potentials while accommodating a personal narrative. Nevertheless Cha balanced this slightly heroic approach to art's making and to the image of the artist by welcoming the objectifying influence of Structuralist (and then just emerging Poststructuralist) theory into her work.

Cha often used 16mm and 8mm cine film while witnessing the arrival of video technology on campus. Access to the manufacture of moving pictures encourages ‘visual’ or ‘studio’ artists to do what writers, musicians, dramatists and storytellers¹ have always done i.e. re-shape and reform narrative, pace, direction, shape and sequence. The photograph, then film, brought us a new awareness of events as they bear upon human experience. Walter Benjamin, in his enduring and influential essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, famously celebrated the photographs of Eugène Atget, pointing out the way in which the photographic image is capable of anthropomorphically and psychologically dramatising otherwise innocuous and uneventful scenes. In the same essay he noted the ‘different nature’ made available to us through photography and film, via slow motion, close-up and X-Ray, as well as pointing to the way that a cinema actor is dehumanised by a narrative process constructed in brief sections, cut-up then stuck back together in a remote and machinic editing process.

¹ *Disease* a female performer of monologues is a term Cha uses repeatedly in her novel.

Meanwhile *Nouveau Roman* writers like Marguerite Duras (an influence on Cha) and Alain Robbe-Grillet, and the famously self-reflexive French New Wave filmmakers, followed in the wake of literary pioneers like James Joyce, Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf in positing ways that modern experience might be perceived and represented as self-conscious ‘scenes’ and ‘events’, thereby questioning existing assumptions about the relationship between subject, environment and an appropriate or adequate means of representation. Similarly, film’s innate sequentiality invited 20th century visual artists to re-sequence images and narratives in an infinite number of ways. An encounter with the arbitrary and interchangeable value of any particular sequence might jolt the artist out of any traditional search for a definitive, ‘true’, or complete image, encouraging instead an investigation of underlying contextual structures that might award certain sequences more (or different) meaning, sense, or value than others. Reading *Jealousy* by Alain Robbe-Grillet (1957), or watching *Girl Chewing Gum* (1976) by John Smith serve to illustrate this tendency.

In De Sousa's display of Cha's *Permutations* (1976) that 'fragment' of Cha we might call the Structuralist filmmaker presents a script or plan for the titled piece as a work in its own right. Carefully typed pages of directions (a form and style common to conceptual practices of Cha's time e.g. think of Vito Acconci's documentation, or the directions provided by Sol Le Witt) are laid-out on a wall in a carefully arranged grid, giving temporary form to the artist's proposition. Elsewhere in the show a typed proposal for another work that might be realised in various ways and in various media has become, under the influence of the curator's installation, a work in itself. Meanwhile, a passage from Cha's novel *Dictée* has been selected and enlarged as neat handwriting along the wall of a passage-like space that constitutes one side of The Korean Cultural Centre's gallery.

In *Permutations*, a sequence of numbered 'shots' is offered as variations of a series. The filmed shots do not vary but their sequence can be interrelated in a number of permutations. Thus no shot takes preference over another, no sequence is 'right' or true, none is essential or originary, so no particular sequence is 'the' film. But what are the 'shots,' what are the individual components of Cha's

Permutations? We see them displayed on a black cube monitor mounted at head height on a plinth adjacent to the typed pages. Each 'shot' lasts about a second. One is the face of a young Korean woman with long, thick black hair (the artist's sister.) One 'shot' shows her with eyes open, another with eyes shut. One 'shot' shows the back of what we assume to be the same head. There is also one blank white 'shot' and one blank black 'shot.'

In this arbitrary, inhuman and non-subjective structure the back of the head becomes no more or less than the front, the face -upon which we might feel inclined to place emphasis- is dethroned by the inhuman rule of the sequence. Front is no higher in hierarchy than back, just as white is no greater than black. We are liberated from qualitative values by an interchangeable quantitative structure. Set in motion and left to run its course Structuralist film might thus dispense with aesthetic judgement, its clarified logic constituting a 'beauty' of its own, not of ours. There are no human choices to be made here, only the mathematical logic of 'one thing after another' (as Cha's contemporaries, the Minimalists once crowed) multiplied by a

crossfire of relations. The art and thought of the 1970s here seem to be priming us for our own epoch of algorithms.

The approach taken in *Permutations* might also be a Structuralist gift to the kind of human subject who prefers to understand the self as having no embodied essence, i.e. who prefers to understand the self not as ‘*the*’ self but rather as *a* self, arbitrarily composed from a limited but interrelated number of social and structural influences. Thus narratives seem less determined, our possibilities and potentials as lateral or holistic as they are linear.

But despite all its technologised Structuralism is *Permutations* nevertheless a human portrait? Viewed in a gallery and transferred – for archival reasons- from film to video and from screen to monitor and plinth it presented a vertical human form - albeit one that has become robotic, geometric, cybernetic, disembodied. The human appeared beheaded by technology as much as it was defaced by sequentiality, nevertheless, at one point in the rolling-out of its sequence we briefly glimpsed within *Permutations*’ ‘shots’ another, different face. It turned out to be the artist’s own. According to the

‘script’ it may or may not belong to the official sequence, it thus behaved something like the mythic *clinamen* (Cha’s late novel revels in such classical and mythic references) that Lucretius suggested could introduce an irregular event into any repetitive series, disrupting regularity to introduce creation through the mischief of unruly chance. The *clinamen* is maverick, an exception, like the clown who contributes an alternative opinion to the insular logic of the court. Cha’s subtle addition of her own face here, out of sequence, ‘out of order’, might just have been evidence of a brave, audacious and mischievous young artist/student testing the boundaries of all that she was working hard to learn and understand at the time *Permutations* was made.

The kind of experimentation found in the 1970s works of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, wherein the human subject investigates identity, body, language and structure through emerging technologies, might serve as an inspiration for today’s practices. 21st Century lives are as engaged with narratives, structures, sequences and technologies as ever and increasingly dominated by the increasingly rapid unfurling of microprocessors and algorithms. But of course there have always been

‘influential technologies’, even the simple and meagre bowl that plays a central role in Cha’s film *‘Re-Disappearing’* (shown by Juliette Desorgues at her ICA screening of a selection of Cha’s film works) is also an ‘influential technology.’ Nevertheless we tend to define modernity according to a special relationship with a certain new and progressive level of engagement with technology, seeing modernity as a rapid advancement through a technological deluge that simultaneously gives human subjects increased power over their environment and an increased sense of powerlessness in comparison with unprecedented technological forces.

Today –as an online ‘friend’ recently described - ‘we spend most of every day alone staring at a lump of plastic’ (i.e. desktop, tablet or smartphone), but what is it that compels us to do so? We might argue it is the appeal of being liberated from the narrative of a human subjectivity that has lost much of its agency, meaning and natural horizon. Computers compensate by providing constant entertainment in a virtual, shrunken, quasi-cinematic space, keeping us distracted and curious, consuming and spectating, never doing nothing, despite achieving little, never lonely, despite being alone. We can perhaps

appear to escape solitude, constantly involving ourselves in surrogate scenarios and the equally algorithm-driven narratives of others, but part of us quietly resents entrapment by these infernal machines that satisfy, pacify, and shut us up. We know there is more to life than our clamped head, entranced eyes, closed mouth and swiping, clicking finger. We are, after all, a whole body that moves, speaks, gestures and that knows emotions that ‘emoticons’ cannot represent. We can see far further than a laptop screen and feel joys and pains that are not synthetic, sequential and mediated but more immediate, unformed and unanticipated.

Discovering Cha’s *oeuvre* allows us to explore an artist who now appears to have pre-empted these concerns by experimenting with examples and manifestations of technology at an earlier stage of their march towards the current ways and means by which they rule our lives today. In *Mouth To Mouth* - installed by De Sousa as an enormous video projection – Cha used montaged film to show a human mouth (perhaps the artist’s) that moves silently in attempts to form shapes by means of which to pronounce Korean vowels. The lips in Cha’s film - sometimes tilted in the centre of the field- subtly

invoked Man Ray's painting '*Observatory Time, The Lovers*' (1936), while their estrangement from any particular face further implicated Freudian, Surrealist, erotic and ambiguous readings - Lewis Carroll's invocation of a 'smile without a cat' came to mind.

We also saw the Korean vowels written, floating past the camera and thus across the screen. Korea devised its own written language system, derived and adapted from its generic Chinese base in 1443, and this innovation was hailed as the masterfully benevolent act of King Seh Jong who thus aimed to liberate and educate the populace while cementing national identity through language. Thus, sight, sound and a national language were all subtly related to gender in this piece while a dehumanising, de-subjectifying close-up brought nature and technology into a reciprocal dialogue. We saw all of these images through a cloud of hazy 'white noise' (a phrase which conflates and confuses the visual with the audible), i.e. the grainy image found on early TV monitors when receiving no signal. The written vowels now appeared to become a technology of their own as we read visual clues and converted them into imagined, meaningful sounds. We saw and read written language but heard it only in mind, and only if we were

familiar with the language. We did however clearly hear a soundscape of noises rising and falling in waves of volume. Amid the mix there was something like hissing technology, something like nature, perhaps ‘white noise’ again, though now as a sound not vision, maybe it was the sea, bubbling water, birdsong or wind in the trees. Technology and nature were synthesised while the two lips of a human mouth struggled to establish communication and locate identity. Instead of meaningful speech we observed this world like the shipwrecked characters of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* or a modern subject progressing through Baudelaire’s ‘forest of symbols’, enduring and decoding a disorienting cacophony of sonic influence.

Technology might promise to save us from nature but only so much, because the ‘natural’ self is formed, in part by technologies, including the ‘technology’ of language. Language has placed demands on the body to conform to it as a kind of master, and yet language is also a slave of the body (recall, again from Carroll’s ‘Alice’ "...which is to be master—that's all"), ever striving to approximate representations of the body’s experience, to enable communication, society, and survival. Meanwhile, in its most sophisticated forms technology

approximates nature, inviting, challenging any definition or boundary that might be drawn between the two. What seems clearly opposed in cultural terms –nature versus technology – is, on closer examination, difficult to untangle. Is a bird’s nest nature or technology? Is speech? Is an umbilical cord nature or technology? Is DNA? Consider the approximation of nature presented by the seamless panels of the futuristic automobile described by Roland Barthes in his essay *The New Citroen*, or the ability to see more than the eye according to what Benjamin called a ‘different nature’ -a term we might today apply to the apparently infinite generative complexity of computer algorithms.

A dialogue between seeing and hearing attendant upon structural operations of language, appeared again in De Sousa’s curation of Cha’s *Aveugle Voix* (1975.) The title invoked a voice of blindness or blindness of voice (we rarely think before we speak, rarely know precisely what we are about to say). In a sequence of B&W photographs documenting this performance the title’s words were seen stencilled onto cloths and wrapped around the artist’s eyes (the word *Voix*), and mouth (the word *Aveugle*.) In the photographs Cha unrolled a scroll revealing a sequence of words in vertical sequence

(that invite reading in either an upward or downward order): ‘... WORDS ... FAIL ... ME ... SANS ... MOT ... SANS ... VOIX ... AVEUGLE ... GESTE.’ In *Mouth to Mouth* the disembodied lips - an organ without body- appeared to fail, in *Aveugle Voix* we were reminded of ambiguities, contradictions and plays in the dialogue between language written and language seen, language spoken and language heard. Meanwhile, the final / first word ‘*geste*’ implied a sense in which the body must ultimately speak for us in order to compensate for impositions or shortcomings of spoken and written language.

In ‘*Mouth To Mouth*’ Korean vowels appeared to be exercising ‘Korean’ muscles – tongue, lips, cheeks, gums, teeth - only to expose the fact that it is this action that partly produces both the human and the nation-al subject. Could we therefore glean from this loc-al, voc-al, nation-al contribution some more universal implication concerning our uncertain, but nevertheless fundamental relationship with language, writing and speaking? The influence of early Derrida seemed to haunt these works by Cha in which a tracery interplay of visibility and audibility in language revealed complex and elusive

differences that might trouble any complacent commitment to Structuralism. Derrida challenged and extended the Structuralist understanding of language and society by showing more complex, compound differences at play in any system of differential relations, thus rendering existing notions of structure over-simplistic or simply inaccurate. E.g. some words might need to be ‘heard’ by the eyes or ‘seen’ by the ears in order for their differential contribution to be clarified. Henceforth, the response, and the role of the philosophical artist or artistic philosopher was not to clarify, consolidate or confirm Structuralist operations - to ‘crack the code’ of language’s underlying structure (an Enlightenment-style aspiration to secular, scientific truth) - but, on the contrary, to cultivate scepticism, to deconstruct, to proliferate doubt and encourage further speculation and experiment.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha seemed to ‘channel’ such ideas, or at least to coincide intuitively and historically with them. The Berkeley campus where she produced most of her work was renowned for engagement with the French theory emerging in the 1970s. Meanwhile she also mixed elements of tradition and invoked a certain mystique alongside her use of cutting-edge French thought and contemporary American

art. She was a young Korean woman who found herself playing with her own language, with her own self and identity *as* language, with languages other than her own; French, American-English and the syntax and narratives proffered by new technologies. Meanwhile, for an artist open to all the expanded possibilities of the art of her time, attuned to modernity and tradition, vision and blindness, speech and silence, sound and movement, spoken and written words, Cha invited all of this to conspire in the production of an enduring and universally comprehensible –albeit occasionally elusive and mysterious- meaning.

If, in *Aveugle Voix*, Cha introduced performed movement and seemed to embodied gesture, in *Mouth To Mouth* we were reminded of the shapes of written language and the shapes that the mouth is forced to make by language in the mouthing of sounds. We were forced to read lips themselves as simultaneously erotic and scientific, a locus of both love and authority, chaos and language, articulate speech and affective howls, a site of desirable consumption and of abject regurgitation.

These moving muscles, vibrating membranes, this seductive valve (Cha also features diagrams of mouth, throat, vocal cords etc. in her novel) is also the entrance to an abject and mysterious interior where

the human subject becomes unknowable, disorganised, even inhuman. But technology's prostheses - be they a newly formed national writing system or the microphone and synthesiser that featured in another 70s performance by Hak Kyung Cha - also make us post-human or superhuman.

Nietzsche provocatively announced that modern man, for all our revolutionary politics and Enlightened aspirations would 'not get rid of god until we are free from grammar.' Tristan Tzara stated in one of his Dada manifestos that "thought is made in the mouth." Meanwhile, Marguerite Duras - in *The Lover*, her best-selling *Nouveau Roman* (an influence on Cha)- wrote: "The story of my life doesn't exist. Does not exist. There's never any centre to it, no path, no line." In these statements we can sense a dependence, helplessness or failure of the modern subject, appealing like a child, railing against the injustice of a tentative, insufficiently determinant grip on the language of our lives.

Do we lead our lives or do our lives lead us? Do we speak our language or does language speak us? With regard to the legacy and

the story of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha such questions of fate and of will, of intention and chance could be mythologised, but here Cha's archive reveals a young artist willing to be led both by the radical thought and the progressive technology of her time, communicating through and beyond any local or given structures of language. If Cha's works remain current, compelling and attract increasing interest today that is testament both to her courage in making genuine speculations and to her ultimate success in 'speaking' (despite all obstacles to comprehension), communicating enduring and pervasive human concerns in a language that we *feel* we understand, rather than a language we 'know' by means of education or convention.

Rather than pinning down who Cha was and explicitly assessing her value today, the co-incidence of Cha's work and De Sousa's well-tempered enthusiasm to share the work with others rather demonstrates the necessity of keeping certain kinds of knowledge at arm's length, suspending judgment and promoting further speculation. While making a special contribution to curating's fundamental and original purposes - maintaining a record of the past, seeking to establish knowledge of a prior event, communicating that knowledge

(or opinion) on to an unknowable future - De Sousa avoided the potential trap of merely aspiring to historical accuracy and facticity and instead anticipated the inflections and accents that her own process was bound to bring to any process of temporal translation. We thus saw Structuralism, Poststructuralism and performativity played out in a procession of theoretical paradigms through a multi-faceted project which asked us to consider how one young artist's works can suggest and question numerous modes of understanding human experiences that are physically embodied, derived from language and from subjective, social and national influence. Technologies were seen to play a part in extending our abilities and identities, as various prostheses simultaneously bring our 'nature' and relationship with 'Nature' into doubt. Ultimately we were confronted with a certain degree of helplessness or vulnerability, showing that we are destined to find more questions than answers within the forest of the self.

Nevertheless, an equally human ability to affirm means that the cultivation of such questions itself becomes a meaningful narrative for us: our remaining 'goal' or 'way'. Thus we might achieve a kind of 'enlightenment' by shedding the burden of any teleological aim or

desire for certainty. Lives and their legacies become experiments, adventures involving risk. Communication tries to sidestep the limitations of everyday speech in search of an *Ur* state that is neither local nor ‘global’, neither ancient, current nor futuristic, but which is untimely; a kind of speech that doesn’t know from where or when it originates; that is innocent of what it intends, has no idea where and when it will be received, nor if it will ever be fully understood.

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